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By Joe Trento

CIA AND DEA BETRAY IRANIAN COLLABORATOR

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They're used to national security cases at the old Federal courthouse in Alexandria, Virginia. Federal prosecutors make certain that cases at all offensive to the CIA end up here, conveniently close to Company HQ in nearby McLean. But in April 1980, there was a drug case tried here that was considered bizarre even in Alexandria. Not much of a defense was put up for the three Iranians on trial, and it ended in a much celebrated conviction by the Drug Enforcement Agency. But it was a hollow victory for the DEA. The trial of Shahrokh Bakhtiar and two co-defendants wasn't really a heroin trial. It was the end of a botched intelligence operation.

Bakhtiar, a well-connected Iranian immigrant, was accused of smuggling more than \$50 million dollars worth of heroin into the United States. He did just that, and he went to prison for it. But that isn't the real story. His purpose, he told friends, was to use these funds to overthrow the Khomeini regime in Iran. Instead of pulling off the coup in his homeland, Bakhtiar, 41, found himself behind bars, a victim of a DEA entrapment operation, abandoned by the intelligence agency that recruited him.

His story was pieced together from details obtained from Federal wiretap logs and interviews with intelligence officials and participants in the case. In early 1979, we found, present and former CIA men approached Bakhtiar and asked him to refrain from filing a lawsuit against top CIA officials and the fallen Shah for the assassination of Bakhtiar's father, the powerful director of SAVAK, the royal government's secret police organization, until his death was ordered by the Shah in 1973. In exchange, Bakhtiar was told that if he assisted the CIA in helping his cousin, former Prime Minister Shahpour Bakhtiar, to

overthrow Khomeini, the CIA would see that he got his share of his late father's half billion-dollar estate, which had been tied up in Swiss bank accounts.

CIA officials told Bakhtiar that a timid Jimmy Carter would never allow the spy agency to finance such a coup, but if Bakhtiar was willing to travel to Iran to tap into the heroin resources of his family, the agency could provide him with a "safe" buyer to raise the money. Bakhtiar's friends warned him that the scheme might be a trap to silence him, but he ignored their admonitions.

Donald E. Deneselya, a former CIA officer, told me that his friend Bakhtiar was "set up." He said Bakhtiar became convinced, in his dealings with SAVAK agents in the United States, that the Shah had betrayed his father on the advice of top CIA officials—including former CIA director Richard Helms—whom he believed were loyal family friends. When he decided to sue the CIA for its role in his father's death, he threatened to reveal "all kinds of things about CIA activities in Iran during the Shah's regime."

Deneselya claims that Bakhtiar inadvertently tipped off Helms and his former CIA colleagues that he was thinking about legal action when he approached Helms' lawyer, Edward Bennett Williams, about taking on the case. Soon afterward, according to Deneselya, family "friends" began telling him that they'd help him get his share of his father's estate if he'd agree to drop the lawsuit. By the late summer of 1979, Bakhtiar was meeting directly with CIA contacts on the deal to import heroin to help overthrow the revolutionary regime and install his cousin Shahpour in power.

But Deneselya said he could offer no proof of his charges because telephone records that showed which CIA officials had contacted Bakhtiar during the last months in 1979 had been kept secret by the DEA.

This reporter has obtained those telephone logs. They list the names of congressmen and intelligence officials who

called Bakhtiar during the period when the heroin traffickers were under DEA investigation.

The registers show that calls were made to Bakhtiar from the private lines of California Representative Don Edwards (D-Cal.) Representative Timothy Wirth (D-Colo.) and Congressional Delegate Walter Fauntroy, (D-Washington, D.C.). All three say they could remember making no such calls.

The register also reveals that at 11:11 p.m. on December 23, 1979, former CIA Director and Ambassador to Iran Richard M. Helms called Bakhtiar from his home number during the narcotics probe and surveillance that led to his arrest. Helms, of course, denies that either he or his wife ever called Bakhtiar.

Other intelligence officials listed on the pen register agreed to talk on the condition they not be identified. They confirm they had discussed a possible coup in Iran with Bakhtiar.

It was soon afterward, according to court records, that Bakhtiar was introduced to a Kenny Feldman as a Mafia buyer for the heroin. The records show that Feldman, who was and is an undercover agent for the DEA, promised Bakhtiar that he could handle all Bakhtiar could bring in, and supplied him with \$36,000 in Agency funds for heroin samples and travel funds. Bakhtiar says he picked up and brought back more than 22 kilos, about 45 pounds, from his contacts in Iran. Court records show that Feldman insisted he be supplied with higher and higher grades of pure heroin. When the purity reached 78 percent, a level that brings additional criminal penalties, Feldman made the arrests.

Since his conviction and imprisonment in the Petersburg, Virginia Federal Correctional Center, Bakhtiar has remained steadfastly silent about the entire case. He faces three more years incarceration before he can be considered for parole. "He still believes his CIA friends will get him off the hook," says a friend. "He is a fool." □